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STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL COOPERATION

COORDINATION AND INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL PROGRAMMES

Report of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination on its fifteenth session

SUMMARY

At its fifteenth session the Working Group made a number of recommendations to the Statistical Commission and a number of decisions, all related to strengthening international statistical cooperation and improving the functioning of the international statistical system. These are contained in annex II, which makes up the bulk of the present report.

The Working Group also reviewed progress on the revision of the System of National Accounts (paras. 6-12).

Points for discussion are set out in annex II (para. 81).

* E/CN.3/1993/1.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The fifteenth session of the Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination of the Statistical Commission was held at New York from 29 June to 1 July 1992. The agenda, as adopted, is contained in annex I to the present report.

2. Following the practice at the fourteenth session of the Working Group and in accordance with the decision of the Statistical Commission, the officers elected at the twenty-sixth session of the Commission who attended the Working Group meeting served as its officers, with W. Begeer (Netherlands), Chairman of the Statistical Commission serving as Chairman of the session. 1/ Other members present were Lelia Boeri de Cervetto (Argentina), Ivan Sujan, Z. Vesely (Czechoslovakia), Majid Jamshidi (Islamic Republic of Iran), Hiroyasu Kudo (Japan), J. A. Mwaniki (Kenya), Alexandre N. Avanesov and Eduarde V. Kudryavtsev (Russian Federation), and Hermann Habermann (United States of America). At the invitation of the Chairman, the following observers were present: Ivan Fellegi and Bela Prigly (Canada), and W. McLennan (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Also at the request of the Chairman, the Secretary and members of the independent Review Group on the global statistical system had been invited. S. Johansson of Sweden (member) and T. J. Griffin (Secretary) were present. An opening statement from the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Development was read. The statement informed members of the Working Group of the establishment of the Department of Economic and Social Development, which had been formed by merging a number of previously separate departments and centres and bringing together research, operations and coordination activities for economic and social development. The statement indicated that the Statistical Division had previously included these three elements in its programme, and it emphasized the timeliness and importance of the review of the global statistical system that the Working Group was carrying out.

3. The following were represented: Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), Customs Cooperation Council (CCC), the European Economic Community (EEC), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the International Statistical Institute (ISI). Ms. C. Carson, an expert on national accounts, was also present.

I. STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL COOPERATION

4. The report of the Working Group on its consideration of the strengthening of international statistical cooperation is contained in annex II of the present document. The Working Group decided that the report should be the principal document before the Statistical Commission for its consideration of item 3 of the agenda of its twenty-seventh session (Strengthening international statistical cooperation).

II. FUNCTIONING OF THE WORKING GROUP

5. The Working Group considered that the question of its functioning had been fully covered during its consideration of the agenda item on strengthening international statistical cooperation (see annex II below).

III. REVISION OF THE SYSTEM OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTS

6. Ms. Carson made an introductory statement on behalf of the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA) informing the Working Group of the progress made by the participating organizations (Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat, IMF, World Bank, OECD, Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) and the United Nations regional commissions) in completing the work on the revision of the System of National Accounts (SNA). Her report covered progress in editing, amending and translating the 21 chapters that constituted the revised SNA; the preparations for the interregional meeting on the SNA, to be hosted by the Government of Mexico in October 1992; work on the priority handbooks; and funding issues.

7. Strong appreciation was expressed by all for the contribution which Ms. Carson had provided in support of the work of ISWGNA. Indeed, the Working Group expressed the wish that she continue to provide support at least until the Statistical Commission meets in February 1993. In response, it was indicated that Ms. Carson would continue her involvement, but at a reduced level.

8. The Working Group was pleased with the progress made in completing the work needed to ensure that the revised SNA would be adopted by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-seventh session. It reaffirmed that deadline, which had been established by the Commission at its last session. It recognized that a small number of conceptual issues were still a matter of concern to some countries and noted that ISWGNA was endeavoring to find acceptable ways of dealing with those issues.

9. The Working Group also stressed the importance of the interregional meeting to be held in October and urged that all preparations for the meeting be completed as quickly as possible. It understood that the purpose of the interregional meeting was to broaden the understanding of the revised SNA

among experts in various parts of the world, address issues related to the implementation of the new SNA and discuss needs for further research and development in the national accounting field.

10. The Working Group noted that work on one of the two priority handbooks - the handbook on SNA for transition economies - had proceeded, and a first draft was now available. Funds had been available to commence work on the handbook on high inflation accounting, but work on it had been delayed because no funds were yet available to complete it. ISWGNA was urged by the Working Group to proceed quickly with the high inflation accounting handbook, which, in the view of the Working Group, responded to important statistical and analytical needs in several regions of the world.

11. Several representatives pointed out that the SNA review process could be considered a model for cooperation among international organizations, countries and experts. The process went far beyond discussions taking place in meetings. It was a remarkably open and consensus-oriented process, which involved a large number of experts with different fields of specialization and took account of the needs of users better than in the past. The Working Group considered that an evaluation of the process and the work of ISWGNA would be helpful in learning from the experience. The amount of resources provided in cash and in kind by international organizations and countries supporting the SNA review process had been very large.

12. Finally, the Working Group reconfirmed that if further obstacles were encountered in completing the revised draft of the SNA in time for the twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission, the final product would have to be adjusted so that the time schedule could be maintained as planned.

IV. DATES AND VENUE OF THE SIXTEENTH SESSION OF THE WORKING GROUP

13. The Working Group recommended to the Statistical Commission that the Working Group hold its sixteenth session in Geneva for up to four days immediately following the session of the International Statistical Institute (ISI) (25 August-3 September 1993). The Working Group noted that there was a trade-off with the scheduling: holding its meeting immediately following the ISI meeting would facilitate attendance at the Working Group for several members but would lengthen the time that members would be required to spend away from their offices. The length of the session would be determined by the Statistical Commission at its twenty-seventh session, depending upon decisions to be made by the Commission, particularly those relating to strengthening international statistical cooperation.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1991, Supplement No. 5 (E/1991/25), para. 221 (a).

Annex I

AGENDA FOR THE FIFTEENTH SESSION

1. Election of officers.

2. Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters.

3. Strengthening international statistical cooperation.

4. Functioning of the Working Group.

5. Revision of the System of National Accounts (SNA).

6. Dates and venue of the sixteenth session of the Working Group.

7. Report of the Working Group on its fifteenth session.

Annex II

STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL COOPERATION

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A. Background and procedure

1. Background

1. The Working Group considered agenda item 3 (Strengthening international statistical cooperation) on the basis of the following documentation:

(a) Report by the Review Group on strengthening international statistical cooperation (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.2);

(b) Report of the Secretary-General on problems, challenges and proposals concerning strengthening international statistical cooperation (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.3);

(c) Report of the Secretary-General on practices and proposals concerning adjustments to reported national data and estimates for non-available national data (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.3/Add.1);

(d) Report of the Statistics and Information Systems Division of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and the Secretary-General, on the state of international merchandise trade statistics on a customs basis (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.4 and Add.1).

2. A written statement prepared jointly by the World Bank and IMF containing comments on the report of the independent Review Group was also available.

3. The first report (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.2) was submitted by the independent Review Group, which had been established at the request of the Working Group at its fourteenth session to (a) carry out a general review of the structure and operation of the global statistical system and international statistical cooperation, (b) develop a plan for a global system that would be more responsive to the full range of current and emerging needs, and (c) carry out an independent review of the role and work of the Statistical Division of the United Nations (see E/CN.3/1993/2, paras. 75, 78 and 80). The second report (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.3) had also been requested by the Working Group at its fourteenth session. The other three reports (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.3/Add.1 and E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.4 and Add.1) had been prepared following the decision of the Working Group at its fourteenth session to include, as one specific aspect of the overall review, the policies and practices of the international organizations concerning the adjustment of nationally supplied statistical data (towards greater conformity with international standards) to improve international comparability of statistics (see E/CN.3/1993/2 para. 81). Those reports also considered the question of international organizations making estimates for non-reported national data. The latter two reports (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.4 and Add.1) largely referred to practices in the field of international trade statistics.

2. Reporting to the Statistical Commission

4. The Working Group discussed the report of the independent Review Group (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.2) at length. It also considered the report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.3) and noted that both reports covered similar areas of concern and were largely consistent with each other. The Working Group made a number of decisions and recommendations (see paras. 18-80 below). It considered various possible ways of reporting to the Commission at its twenty-seventh session on the strengthening of international statistical cooperation and decided that the best approach would be to have the minimum number of discussion papers, supplemented by background papers. Consequently, the Working Group decided that its own report on this agenda item at its current session would be the principal document before the Commission. It was stressed that the report would have to stand on its own as a discussion paper. The Working Group requested the Chairman to ensure that the report was prepared accordingly and that it contained the proposals of the Working Group for consideration by the Commission. That report would be supplemented by a report of the Secretary-General on the Secretariat's work in implementing the Working Group's recommendations and decisions, as well as any problems involved. The reports of the independent Review Group (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.2) and the Secretary-General (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.3) would be available to the Commission as background documents. The Working Group requested the Secretariat to make them available in all the official languages of the Commission. To assist Commission members in reviewing the background documents and decisions of the Working Group, the Secretariat would prepare cross-references between the two documents and include them as an annex to either the report of the Working Group on its fifteenth session or the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Working Group's recommendations and decisions. Accordingly, the cross-references are included in annex III to the present report.

3. Mandate and procedure

5. The Working Group noted that the Review Group had summarized its mandate as follows: "Describe the present situation and the goals and objectives, mechanisms, mandates and resource issues of those involved in the system, and determine what needs to be done; define the structural arrangements, the resources and a time scale for introducing the needed changes." The Review Group was composed of W. Begeer (Netherlands), E. A. de Almeida Guimaraes (Brazil), E. Oti Boateng (Ghana) and S. Johansson (Sweden). T. J. Griffin (United Kingdom) had acted as Secretary to the Review Group. The Review Group had indicated that from the time the actual work began, it became obvious that the allotted time was too short. The report had to be ready by the end of April 1992 at the latest, and the staff facilities required to produce a report that would satisfy all the observations that had been made by the Working Group at its fourteenth session (see E/CN.3/1993/2, para. 77) were not available. The Review Group had studied numerous documents, but initial experience showed that communication in writing would not be a good substitute for personal contact. Although the Review Group had not been able to visit all the agencies, a number of them had been visited. The Review Group had expressed

its gratitude to all colleagues who had devoted time to in-depth discussion of problems, while at the same time providing information on their agencies. The discussions had been open and frank. The Review Group had indicated that it had met with a great deal of goodwill towards the search for improvements in the global statistical system.

4. The problems addressed

6. The Working Group recalled its discussion at its fourteenth session concerning the problems of the international statistical system. At that time the Working Group had noted the rapid economic and political changes that were occurring in many parts of the world and had recognized that they had significant implications for international statistical work. Demands for statistics were escalating, along with demands for greater detail, timeliness and comparability and for better quality in statistics, both nationally and internationally. Data comparability underpinned by internationally determined classifications and concepts was essential. The situation was made more complex by the changes that were being made or were foreseen in the organization and definition of States in different parts of the world, as well as by the current and planned development of free trade areas and unified statistical practices among groups of countries in both developed and developing regions. Resource availability for statistical work at both the national and international levels had in many cases been reduced and in virtually all situations was stretched to its limits. Yet statistical services had to provide for a range of continuing needs while responding to the new needs for data. All of those factors placed extra pressure on statistical development at the national and international levels. The Working Group had also noted a number of significant initiatives in international statistical cooperation in Europe. In particular it had noted the initiative taken by EEC and OECD to strengthen statistical cooperation between the two organizations in developing statistical standards to serve the needs of their member States. The Working Group emphasized that it would be necessary to ensure that global standards remained in place and that those standards took account of the circumstances and needs of all countries, especially developing countries. Given the recent changes, the Working Group was of the view that the resources for development and coordination could be more effectively utilized to strengthen all aspects of the international system.

7. The Working Group also noted the observations in the reports of the Review Group and the Secretary-General on problems in the global statistical system and the need to improve the system. The Review Group had observed that the international statistical system had developed over many years. It was a complex system. There were many agencies involved: agencies at the global level more or less specialized in specific statistical subjects, regional and intergovernmental agencies, which all had their own governmental bodies and were in principle independent and largely autonomous. The system needed coordination in order to achieve and maintain coherence, credibility and usefulness, to avoid duplication of work and a waste of resources and to deliver technical cooperation to countries for improving their statistical capacity and basic statistics.

8. While the international statistical system had many notable achievements, the Review Group had observed that there was a widespread need for an enhanced effort to improve the performance of the system as a whole to satisfy needs and use available resources efficiently. The capabilities of the national statistical systems still differed too widely. The many efforts to improve that situation needed stronger coordination. Technological developments had led to a different type of use of the available statistics. While in the past statistics in printed publications had been used more or less at face value, currently a growing number of users stored statistics in accessible databases in machine-readable form, and had more facilities for comparing similar statistics, testing them for consistency and using them for sophisticated analysis. The user had become more critical. The dissemination process needed special attention because it had expanded and grown more diverse. Various organizations published and used different values for the same series. The Statistical Commission had been hampered in its coordinating work by a severe lack of continuity in its membership and by the fact that its sessions were biennial. There was too little continual involvement in what was going on.

9. The report of the Secretary-General had indicated that the system had largely achieved its objectives over the years, within the limits of the resources made available for statistical work. More needed to be done, however. In terms of data, the global statistical system had incomplete country coverage as well as variations in timeliness, detail and quality. Methodological work had not covered all subject areas simultaneously. The system had been slow to respond to some emerging needs. In technical cooperation and such other areas as scheduling of meetings there had been instances of lack of coordination. More recently changes had occurred which had created additional problems, reducing the effectiveness of the system and making some of its deficiencies more apparent. These changes included:

(a) Initiatives in European organizations towards more rapid development of standards to meet the needs of developed countries that had raised concerns about maintaining consistency with world-level standards;

(b) Initiatives of several organizations in support of various survey programmes in developing countries that had given rise to coordination problems;

(c) Technology changes that had enabled users to access and use larger amounts of statistical data from a multitude of sources, as a result of which inconsistencies in data had become more apparent and demands for more detailed data on a more timely basis had increased;

(d) More restrictive limitations on resources for statistical purposes, which had adversely affected statistical activities.

These, among other developments, had focused increasing attention on the system and elicited calls for efforts to improve its functioning.

B. General discussion by the Working Group

10. During a general discussion, the Working Group welcomed the reports of the Review Group and the Secretary-General. It expressed its appreciation to the Review Group for its responsiveness to the Working Group's request (see para. 3 above) and particularly for its efforts to improve the organizational aspects of coordination mechanisms and the functioning of the Statistical Commission and the Working Group. The Working Group considered that the reports contributed to an understanding of what was needed to improve statistical work and its coordination. The Working Group noted the observation that a proactive approach was needed that identified specific options and approaches to current problems and the Working Group supported the approach of the Review Group in looking at mechanisms for intergovernmental review and coordination.

1. Statistical Commission

11. The Working Group agreed that in reviewing the global statistical system it was correct to keep the basic existing model while recommending that the role of the Statistical Commission and its methods of work should change to allow it to become more actively involved. One approach suggested was that, in making decisions about coordination, the Statistical Commission should evaluate the products of the system rather than the process. This could be supported by the preparation and review of a 10-year plan of products and services of the system. The Working Group considered it important that the Statistical Commission should work within the independent mandates/programmes and priorities set by the governing bodies of the various organizations. It should have a descriptive plan of the work of the organizations involved so that it could have an overall view of plans and how they relate to each other, promote their integrated and cooperative implementation, and perhaps identify gaps or inadequacies in the plans in relation to perceived needs. The Statistical Commission and the agencies should continue in their roles of ensuring consistent and compatible standards in related fields; carrying out, in an efficient and coordinated way, data collection, processing, storage and dissemination; and providing technical cooperation. The Working Group saw issues and problems being discussed informally and formally, bilaterally, multilaterally and in technical working groups and the Subcommittee on Statistical Activities of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). Ideally, solutions would thereby be found and brought to the attention of the Working Group and Statistical Commission. In the absence of agreed solutions, unresolved problems would be brought to those bodies, along with alternatives for their consideration. The Working Group agreed that the conduct of the Statistical Commission meetings should change to reduce the length of descriptive oral statements and substitute written background reports, and thus allow the Commission the necessary time to concentrate on its advisory role. The question of whether the Commission fully represented all the statistical interests at the national level was raised.

2. Coordination

12. The Working Group noted that there were many different perspectives on coordination, and that coordination existed in many areas already and had been successful. This experience could be built upon in a pragmatic way to eliminate duplication and conflicts to the extent possible and to enhance interaction. Rather than an overall structured approach, a pragmatic approach was called for, that would select individual areas of work for review and action in order to achieve results in the short term.

13. While it was agreed that the Statistical Division of the United Nations had a central coordination role, it was important to clarify the source of its authority to perform that coordinating role. This would involve determining the role of coordination and how it should be carried out in the light of all the changes that had occurred over the years, including the number and range of organizations involved and their range of work. The point was made that a cumbersome bureaucratic process was not needed. Efforts at improvement would involve looking at the role of the Statistical Commission in relation to other organizations and the Statistical Division. It was noted by some that there could be a potential conflict of interest between the different roles of the Statistical Division as a coordinator and as an organization with substantive statistical responsibilities, and it was thought that some realignment of roles might help to deal with this issue.

3. Regional and country concerns

14. The point was made that improved coordination among international institutions at the country level was needed, such as had been introduced in Africa. It was also thought desirable to promote more participation of countries at the regional level especially in technical cooperation, and to strengthen work at the regional level. This would be expected to help the Statistical Commission to meet its responsibilities.

4. Consistency of member States' positions

15. There was general agreement that member States needed to work consistently through the various intergovernmental bodies for consistency of views and coordination of the work programmes that they endorsed in the different organizations. It was noted that although organizations had their own work programmes determined by the various intergovernmental bodies, they tried to implement them in conjunction with other organizations.

5. Resources and priority matters

16. The Working Group considered that resource and priority issues needed greater attention because of limitations on resources.

C. Specific recommendations and decisions by the Working Group

17. The Working Group formulated a number of recommendations to the Statistical Commission. The Working Group also took a number of decisions or similar actions. Both the recommendations and the decisions were based on the ideas of the Review Group and the Secretary-General and their discussion by the Working Group. The recommendations are presented in paragraphs 18, 22, 25, 28, 32, 57, 59, 61 and 71 of the present report, and they are underlined. The decisions or similar actions are to be found in paragraphs 24, 36, 43, 48, 51, 55, 59, 65, 67, 69, 76 and 78-80 of the present report. The order in which the recommendations and decisions are presented is generally in accordance with the order in which the Review Group had summarized its suggestions in its report (see E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.2, chap. IV).

1. Organization of coordination

(a) The Statistical Commission

Recommendation 1

18. The Statistical Commission should consider requesting the Economic and Social Council to change the cycle of Commission sessions so that, depending on needs, annual meetings of eight half days spread over five calendar days could be held instead of a single session of eight full days every second year.

19. The Review Group had noted that the involvement of members in the work of the Commission could be strengthened through greater continuity in membership. It had considered that this could also be achieved through holding sessions more frequently. The report of the Secretary-General had pointed out that it was not considered appropriate to include in his report recommendations concerning the intergovernmental bodies. However, the report of the Secretary-General had indicated that the Statistical Commission and the Economic and Social Council might wish to consider how the intergovernmental machinery could be adapted to better achieve the goal of a well coordinated global statistical system based on the work of the United Nations, the specialized agencies, other organizations in statistics and the national statistical services of the Member States.

20. The Review Group had recommended that the cycle of Commission sessions be changed to annual meetings of eight half days spread over five calendar days. However, participants at the Working Group meeting expressed a range of views on this recommendation. Many endorsed it as an action needed to strengthen the work of the Commission, to promote improved coordination among agencies, to permit the Commission to respond more rapidly to changing needs and to promote continuity of membership in successive sessions. One member suggested annual meetings of eight days each. Others considered that holding annual Statistical Commission meetings would represent a step which, if extended to regional meetings as well, would increase the number of international meetings

to be attended by countries to an unacceptably high number. Resource implications for the United Nations and countries were noted with concern. The point was made that the goals of the Commission and increased involvement of members could be achieved in other ways, such as tele-conferencing. The point was also made that special sessions of the Commission could be convened as circumstances required rather than establishing an annual cycle of meetings. It was suggested that during the 1994-1995 biennium a special session of four days should be convened in 1994, followed by the regular session in 1995, also limited to four days. It was recognized that many of the recommendations of the Working Group, if accepted by the Commission at its session in 1993, would require prompt follow-up in 1994 and 1995. A full statement of the need for and objectives of such special sessions would need to be developed.

21. Several members noted that questions relating to documentation and conduct of the Commission's sessions were related to the question of the frequency of meetings. In particular, more flexibility was needed in the time schedule for approving the inclusion of documents in the agenda of the Commission, and documents should be briefer and more precisely focused on the issues. The Director of the Statistical Division reconfirmed the long-standing practice that documents for the Commission could be prepared by the Secretariat, by any of the international organizations, or by countries themselves. This was important since on many issues expertise was located in various international organizations and in the national statistical authorities.

Recommendation 2

22. The Commission should decide, with immediate effect:

(a) To nominate officers for the following session at the end of a current session, with formal election at the beginning of the following session, to re-elect the same persons a number of times as officers and to provide for the officers to meet informally;

(b) To request the Secretariat to give a copy of the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council to new officers, and to consider drafting a simplified version of the rules incorporating practical hints;

(c) To request the Statistical Division to invite chairpersons of regional conferences of chief statisticians to participate in the sessions;

(d) To request participants to present their reports to the Commission as documents or background papers and not as lengthy oral statements;

(e) To request the Secretariat to ensure that specific agenda items are well prepared and well documented through discussions and reports of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities and/or the Working Group.

23. The Review Group had noted that according to the current rules, the election of officers took place at the beginning of a session, from among the representatives of the members. Such a procedure might work well if there was continuity in membership, since under those circumstances the newly elected officers usually would be familiar with what was going on. In the case of the Commission this condition was not generally met. One of the consequences of this procedure was that the chairpersons and the other officers might not be well prepared. The Review Group had noted that the officers of the Commission did not usually meet, except in the context of the wider Working Group, but they could consider meeting informally, before and/or after the Working Group meetings. The Review Group had suggested that the chairpersons of the regional conferences of chief statisticians should participate in the sessions of the Commission. The Review Group did not see the need for the Commission to listen to lengthy oral reports as the necessary information could be delivered in written form, which would allow the Commission to give the reports the full consideration necessary and spend the necessary time on its advisory functions. (See para. 19 above for the views contained in the report of the Secretary-General.)

24. In relation to paragraph 22 (a) above it was pointed out that nominating the officers in advance was desirable for the sake of continuity, but it was also important to provide for the participation of new members (as provided for by the Review Group). The idea that officers should be more active between sessions of the Commission was endorsed. In relation to paragraph 22 (c) above, it was suggested that the Commission should consider increasing its membership to ensure broader representation of countries and regions. The Working Group noted that currently chairpersons of regional conferences were invited to attend Commission sessions, but that was an informal practice. To formalize the practice, approval by the Economic and Social Council would be required.

Decision 1

25. "The Working Group decided that, for the 1993 session of the Statistical Commission, the Statistical Division should continue its informal practice of inviting chairpersons of regional conferences to attend Commission sessions."

(b) Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination

Recommendation 3

26. The Statistical Commission should decide with immediate effect:

(a) To recommend to the Economic and Social Council that the Working Group should hold two meetings a year, each of two days duration;

(b) To determine the membership of the Working Group at the end of each session of the Commission and give preference to newly nominated officers for the next session;

(c) To request the Statistical Division to invite the chairpersons of the regional conferences of chief statisticians to participate in the meetings of the Working Group;

(d) To request the Working Group to prepare short reports of its meetings and to ensure that the meetings mainly result in specific documentation for the Commission.

27. The Review Group had noted that one of the tasks of the Working Group was to follow up and prepare for sessions of the Statistical Commission. It was responsible to the Commission, which took the ultimate decisions. Intensive contacts between the Commission and the specialized agencies were also maintained in the Working Group. The Review Group had therefore considered that continuity of membership in the Working Group was perhaps even more important than continuity of membership in the Statistical Commission. In the opinion of the Review Group there was no need for a lengthy report of the Working Group meetings. In principle, all the time available for the meetings should be used for the meetings themselves. The output of the meetings should be in the form of reports/advice for the Commission. (See also para. 19 above for the relevant views contained in the report of the Secretary-General.)

(c) The ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities

Recommendation 4

28. The Statistical Commission should decide with immediate effect:

(a) To request the Statistical Division and the agencies to place more emphasis on coordination aspects;

(b) To request the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities to form ad hoc groups for special topics;

(c) To request the ACC Subcommittee to prepare specific documentation on appropriate issues for the Commission through the Working Group;

(d) To request the ACC Subcommittee to ensure that reports on its meetings provided to the Commission were not lengthy.

29. The Working Group noted that while the requests in paragraph 28 (a) and (b) above did not seem new, they did contain new features on substantive aspects of coordination and general matters (see paras. 45-73 below).

30. The Review Group had indicated that from recent reports of meetings of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities and from comments by some of the representatives of the agencies, the Review Group had formed the clear impression that the meetings of the Subcommittee could in principle contribute more to coordination. The report of the Secretary-General had indicated that to meet the problems identified the approach to coordination required a basic stocktaking, drawing on past experience. The existing structures and

mechanisms needed to be made to work consistently to accommodate change. Over the years a number of changes had been introduced in organizational responsibilities and mechanisms for coordination to deal with new challenges and needs for data. However, to accommodate those new developments further modifications in the global statistical system might be desirable. A practical long-term approach would be to proceed with a review on a subject-by-subject basis, with the agencies involved defining all the elements to be considered and investigating their implications. The report of the Secretary-General had indicated that the Statistical Division would initiate such a programme.

31. The Working Group emphasized the importance of the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities and considered that it was a useful framework for coordination. In addition, it served to keep all agencies informed of developments when individual agencies could not be involved in specialized meetings in particular subject areas. The Working Group noted that it had already taken action related to the request contained in paragraph 28 (b) above (see paras. 51-55 below) in terms of the six subject areas for which special task forces had been established. The Working Group welcomed the Subcommittee's practice of trying to schedule its meetings in connection with other scheduled meetings to reduce costs and promote participation. It also welcomed receiving the reports of the Subcommittee on a regular basis.

(d) Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat

Recommendation 5

32. The Commission should request the Statistical Division:

(a) To find ways to strengthen its role in serving the purposes and work of the Commission;

(b) To place more emphasis on coordination matters.

33. The Working Group noted that while the requests in paragraph 32 (a) and (b) above did not seem new, they did contain new features on substantive aspects of coordination and general matters (see paras. 45-73 below).

34. The Review Group had noted that the Statistical Division had a central function. It was involved in a restricted number of subjects, as far as the collection and processing of data and dissemination was concerned (which de facto implied specialization). It acted as secretariat of the Commission and of the Working Group. It was responsible for promoting coordination of the statistical system. The report of the Secretary-General had proposed that the Statistical Division (a) investigate ways to organize its resources, priorities and structure to enable it to carry out more fully its responsibility for the overall task of promoting coordination of international statistical work; (b) review the range of work it undertook to determine its ongoing usefulness in relation to user needs and the work of other international organizations, with the aim of defining the appropriate fields

of work for itself for the coming decade; and (c) investigate possibilities for reassignment of resources within the Division through both a review of priorities and a balance of effort between compilation and methodological development and dissemination through large statistical publications and dissemination in machine-readable form, taking into account the needs of various groups of users in different countries.

35. The Working Group noted that the requests contained in paragraph 32 (a) and (b) above were particularly important if the recommendations concerning the Statistical Commission and the Working Group (see paras. 18-22 and 26 above) were to be acted upon. A more active Secretariat function would be required, with significant implications for the disposition of the resources of the Statistical Division.

36. Participants at the Working Group session expressed a range of views on priorities. The point was made that the Statistical Division should consider the possibility of releasing resources from other activities to satisfy recommendations 1 to 5 abive, which it might accomplish by realigning its activities and consulting with agencies on a different division of labour. The point was made that the Statistical Division should prepare a programme of specific priorities over a three-year period taking account of the work of other organizations.

Decision 2

37. "The Working Group requested the Secretariat to develop proposals presenting several options to the Commission on how the Statistical Division might restructure its work programme to respond to these recommendations, including an indication of internal reallocations of resources that might be necessary".

38. The Director of the Statistical Division indicated that the Statistical Commission as representative of the national statistical services of countries was uniquely well-positioned to set priorities for work on methods, technical cooperation and coordination. However, a broad range of users were also involved in data collection, compilation and dissemination activities. Thus, when it came to compilation and dissemination of statistics, the Secretary-General would also have to take the views of users into account. The Director indicated that he would prepare, for consideration by the Commission at its twenty-seventh session, options for restructuring the Division's programme, based both on the views of the Working Group and previous Statistical Commissions and, as required, on consultation with the Secretariat, regional commissions, agencies and countries. He also indicated that resource requirements to service the Statistical Commission and the Working Group would be reduced for the Division to the extent that other organizations and countries themselves were willing to prepare discussion documents for the sessions.

(e) Strengthening the role of the regional statistics divisions and conferences of chief statisticians

39. The Working Group considered the following recommendations of the independent Review Group concerning regional matters:

(a) The Commission should advise regional commissions through the Economic and Social Council, to strengthen statistics divisions;

(b) The Commission should advise regional commissions, through the Economic and Social Council, to promote the establishment of conferences of chief statisticians in those areas where they do not already exist;

(c) The Commission should request agencies working at world level to cooperate to the fullest extent with regional statistics divisions and conferences of chief statisticians on statistics, standards and technical assistance;

(d) Regional conferences of chief statisticians should be more involved in the development/revisions of standards and in technical assistance projects;

(e) Statistics divisions of the regional commissions should be involved in pilot studies to test draft standards, in preparing adapted handbooks and in monitoring adherence to adopted standards.

40. The Review Group had noted that regional conferences of chief statisticians did not exist in all regions. The Review Group wanted to emphasize that such regional conferences could be of great importance in the context of coordination in several respects: exchanging experiences, develop/revision of standards where necessary and adapting handbooks to local circumstances. They could also play a crucial role in giving advice on technical assistance activities and monitoring implementation of standards at the national level. The Review Group was of the opinion that the regional conferences of chief statisticians and the statistics divisions of the regional commissions should be assisted to attain a more equal level of performance. One of the fundamental weaknesses of the global statistical system was that in many member States the statistical systems were weak. This imbalance needed correction. Structural solutions had to be found for making it possible for all member States to participate in the development of a better global statistical system. The report of the Secretary-General had foreseen a continuation of the initiatives that had already been taken to encourage methodological work, such as the use of outputs of regional commissions as a basis for global work. It had noted that a new distribution of selected aspects of the work of developing methods and standards could be considered. It could be based on technical or geographical aspects, and should take into account resources available in each organization. In particular, the present and the possible future role of the statistical divisions of the regional commissions in that respect should be reviewed. Roles of the regional commissions in data collection, processing and dissemination and in technical cooperation would also benefit from review.

The report also noted that retaining a strong and vigorous regional component in statistical work, both at the intergovernmental level and in the secretariats of all the regional organizations, was essential and called for renewed effort to determine the appropriate balance of effort between the central and regional bodies in terms of methodological development and data collection and compilation.

41. The Working Group was informed of the interest of member States in statistical activities at the regional level and the effectiveness of these activities, as reflected in the level of participation of member States in regional statistical conferences. In this context, the point was made that resource allocation at the regional level, particularly to support improvement of national statistical systems and basic statistics, deserved attention, especially during the current period of resource review in the United Nations.

42. Based on the report of the Review Group, the Working Group agreed that there was a range of deficiencies and imbalances in the statistical system as a whole, especially in relation to developing countries and countries in transition. Action was needed at the country level and the Working Group considered that regional conferences of statisticians were helpful to countries in providing a forum for exchanging information, sharing experience, providing mutual assistance and discussing technical cooperation coordination. They also constituted a group that could be addressed as representative of a region. The Working Group noted that if regional conferences of chief statisticians were to be established in each region where they did not yet exist and if all of the regional conferences played the full role envisaged for them, then the regional commissions would need to enhance their statistical divisions to support these conferences.

43. The Working Group broadly supported the recommendations of the Review Group set out in paragraph 39 above.

Decision 3

44. "The Working Group established a drafting group, consisting of the representatives of Argentina, the United States of America, ESCAP, ECLAC and the World Bank, to prepare recommendations concerning the role of the regional statistical conferences and statistical divisions, which would be put before the Statistical Commission at its twenty-seventh session with a view to the Commission making appropriate recommendations to the Economic and Social Council."

2. Substantive aspects of coordination

(a) Integrated work programmes and improved documentation

45. The Working Group considered the following recommendations of the independent Review Group on substantive aspects of coordination:

(a) To request the Statistical Division, in cooperation with international agencies, to develop a (hierarchical) classification of statistical subjects as a basis for programmes and coordination;

(b) To request the development of the following on the basis of the classification referred to in paragraph (a) above, ensuring that the three programmes should be related and should pay attention to the available resources:

(i) A (descriptive) integrated programme on data collection, data processing and dissemination of statistics;

(ii) A (descriptive) integrated programme on the construction/revision of standards;

(iii) A (descriptive) integrated programme on technical assistance;

(c) To request the Statistical Division to update and improve the documentation on the global statistical system so that the documentation was related to the above-mentioned programmes.

46. The Review Group had believed that one of the fundamental problems in the international statistical field was that although the division of labour was clear and logical in some areas, in other areas it was not. The Review Group considered that ideally matters of specialization and division of labour should be clearly described in integrated work programmes. The Review Group considered that a well-developed classification of statistical subjects would enable programmes of work of different agencies to be described in a common framework, which would allow the identification of gaps and overlaps and therefore act as a tool of coordination. The Review Group indicated that it had met with insufficient and outdated (at least for its purposes) documentation on the global statistical system. Continual updating of the available documentation, structured in a different way, could be instrumental for an integrated statistical programme.

47. The report of the Secretary-General had proposed - and there was strong support for this from the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities - that all the methodological work performed by or under the responsibility of international organizations should be planned within the framework of a 10-year plan. This plan would be elaborated through consultations in the ACC Subcommittee and under the responsibility of the Statistical Commission's Working Group, and it would be submitted for the approval of the Commission. The report of the Secretary-General had also noted that basic tools for promoting the necessary coordination had been developed by the ACC Subcommittee. These included the inventory of statistical data collection activities, the inventory of machine-readable statistical databases, the list of international classifications used in statistics, the list of contact addresses for national statistical authorities, and the Directory of International Statistics. The report of the Secretary-General considered that

these should be kept up-to-date and used more fully for coordination purposes, and should be supplemented by current information on the global statistical system.

48. The Working Group agreed that while integrated reporting of plans (by subject) to the Commission was important, the recommendations of the Review Group contained in paragraph 45 (a) and (b) would take two years to implement.

Decision 4

49. "The Working Group requested that the Statistical Division and the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities present inter-agency planning reports on a subject basis where feasible at the twenty-seventh session of the Commission."

50. The Working Group agreed that it was not necessary to complete the classification (see para. 45 (a) above) before commencing reviews of particular subject areas; nor was it necessary to conduct a comprehensive review of all areas. The classification presented in the Review Group report (see E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.2, annex II) could be used on an interim basis and refined as needed. A preference was expressed for reviews of individual subject areas, such as those already being conducted by the international organizations in the area of international trade statistics, at the request of the ACC Subcommittee and the Working Group. The Working Group endorsed in principle the recommendations of the Review Group as set out in paragraph 45 (a) and (b) above as a long-term programme. It also endorsed the recommendation set out in paragraph 45 (c) and noted the Secretary-General's intention to maintain up-to-date documentation on the global statistical system and use it more fully for coordination purposes. The Working Group also decided on a pragmatic approach for the short term and considered that additional action was needed in the short term on reviews of individual subject-matter areas.

Decision 5

51. "The Working Group identified six subject-matter areas where a need for review was considered a priority. The Working Group noted that task force mechanisms already existed for two of the areas, established new task forces for the other four and, with the agreement of the agencies concerned, appointed conveners for each of the task forces as follows:

1. National accounts (already existing; convener: ISWGNA);

2. Industrial and construction statistics (convener: OECD);

3. International trade statistics (already existing; convener: GATT);

4. Finance statistics (convener: IMF);

5. Price statistics including the ICP (convener: EUROSTAT);

6. Environment statistics (convener: Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat).

52. "An additional area of review, a technical cooperation issue, was identified - poverty, social indicators and household surveys to obtain relevant information - but action on it was deferred to allow concentration on the six areas identified above.

53. "The Working Group requested the task forces to:

"(a) Determine work being done in the specified area by the organizations involved on methods, collection, compilation, processing and dissemination and technical cooperation, although it was recognized that technical cooperation might not lend itself to treatment on a subject-by-subject basis but might need to be reviewed in an integrated way;

"(b) Assess problems, duplication, weaknesses, imbalances and priority gaps;

"(c) Study how to carry out an evaluation of the quality of the statistics in the outputs and carry out such an evaluation as far as possible;

"(d) Review the publications issued by each organization in the field of statistics and make recommendations, taking account of the needs of the range of users;

"(e) Take agreed actions to improve the system-wide work in the area, including its coordination;

"(f) Report to the Working Group at its next session on actions taken and/or present proposals and unresolved issues for action by the Working Group.

54. "The task forces were expected to work in a flexible way, consulting with and involving the concerned international organizations and coopting individual countries to provide country perspectives as necessary. They were also expected to find ways to incorporate the needs of users and to decide on the appropriate methods of work.

55. "The task forces were requested to report to the Working Group at its meeting in 1993, although it was recognized that progress would be different among the various groups, and in any case work on the national accounts would not start until the ISWGNA had completed work on the revision of the SNA."

56. The Working Group noted previous and ongoing work done by the organizations aimed at improving coordination. It also noted that while significant duplication of data collection had not been reported by members, the review process outlined above would deal with any specific problems and the integrated programmes would provide a good tool for maintaining a coordinated system.

(b) Standards

(i) System of monitoring

Recommendation 6

57. The Commission should request the Statistical Division of the United Nations, in cooperation with the statistical divisions of the regional commissions and other relevant agencies, to set up a system for monitoring adherence to adopted United Nations classifications, provide a description of the present situation on the adoption of classifications in the member countries and their relationship to adopted United Nations classifications, and submit a progress report to the Commission at its twenty-eighth session.

58. The Review Group had considered that classifications should not be the outcome of theoretical discussions only, but that in the course of the development/revision process there should be room for pilot studies to test empirically how a draft classification worked out. The Review Group had considered that after a classification system was adopted, its application by member countries should be monitored. The results of monitoring should be used as feedback for further revisions. The report of the Secretary-General had indicated that the principal challenges facing the global statistical system in this area were the following: (a) to respond rapidly to the accelerating demand for developing new methods and standards or revising old ones in various areas, (b) to ensure the global coherence of these standards through cohesive statistical systems or frameworks, (c) to ensure that these standards were suitable for countries at every level of development, and (d) to assist countries in implementing these methods and standards.

(ii) Flexible standards

Recommendation 7

59. The Commission, at its twenty-seventh session, should consider the following as a possible special topic for discussion at its twenty-eighth session, in 1995: "Advantages and disadvantages of more flexible standards (classifications and other elements), concentrating in the first instance on classifications for economic activities and commodities (International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities, revision 3; the General Industrial Classification of Economic Activities within the European Communities, revised; and other classifications)". The Working Group considered that the Commission could make a decision on the special topic at its twenty-seventh session and could request that a discussion paper be prepared for the twenty-eighth session.

60. The Review Group had considered that a coherent system of global statistics required statistics that were based on common concepts, definitions and classifications and on a common methodology in the application of the classifications. In view of difficulties in implementation in countries, the Review Group had considered that the solution might involve seeking not one

fixed system but a set of related systems. The solution they had in mind was one in which apparently different systems would be designed so that they might be linked at some or all levels in their hierarchies. (See also para. 58 above for the views contained in the report of the Secretary-General.)

(iii) Reducing duplication in collecting and processing data

Recommendation 8

61. The Commission should request the Statistical Division and the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities to give continual attention to reducing duplication in collecting and processing data from member countries, and request a progress report for each session of the Commission, along the lines of chapter I of the inventory of statistical data collection activities (see E/CN.3/AC.1/1991/R.7); the report (and the inventory) should be reorganized along subject-matter lines.

62. The Review Group had noted that in practice data were collected from countries in many ways and by many agencies. The Review Group had ascertained that in recent years progress had been made in coordination and cooperation between the agencies involved. Due to the different circumstances between the countries, the different positions of the statistics divisions in the regional commissions, and the differences in definitions and classifications used by agencies, the Review Group was of the opinion that there was no uniform model to be advocated. The report of the Secretary-General had pointed out that a number of concrete measures had been taken to strengthen coordination of international compilation and dissemination and some success had been achieved. However, the report had recognized that major challenges and problems existed.

(iv) Evaluation

63. The Working Group considered the recommendation of the independent Review Group "to develop a programme for auditing statistics disseminated in whatever form by the Statistical Division, the statistical divisions of the regional commissions and the other agencies in the United Nations system". That would be done on the basis of the classification of statistical subjects referred to in paragraph 45 (a) above. The Review Group had discussed the fact that quite a number of agencies were currently producing and/or disseminating statistical data on the same statistical subjects. It considered this one of the most urgent problems to be looked into, especially because in this field there was rapid development, which might worsen the situation in the near future. The Review Group thought it possible to reduce the number of diverging series through better coordination between the relevant agencies in the field of dissemination. The report of the Secretary-General had pointed out a number of strengths of the outputs and a number of weaknesses in the dissemination of statistics internationally. For example, (a) users of international data might have difficulty locating and accessing data of concern to them because of the large and relatively specialized nature of producers of data; (b) different and sometimes conflicting data were maintained in different international organizations.

64. The Working Group found that the word "auditing" as used by the Review Group in its recommendation (see para. 63) gave rise to some misunderstanding and decided that the word "evaluation" was preferable in this context. The participants at the Working Group meeting expressed a range of views on the priority to be given to this activity.

Decision 6

65. "The Working Group requested the task forces established under paragraphs 50-55 above to investigate ways to carry out the evaluations and to carry them out as far as possible."

3. General matters

(a) A review of publications

66. The Working Group considered the following recommendations of the independent Review Group on a review of publications:

> "Consider the review undertaken by the Conference of European Statisticians. a/ Set up a similar review. This item primarily concerns the publications in printed or similar form, but the relationship with machine-readable forms of dissemination should be taken into account. The Commission may request the Statistical Division and the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities to set up an ad hoc group consisting of representatives of the agencies involved, assisted by persons from national statistical offices."

The Review Group had expressed its doubts about the usefulness of some of the publications from the agencies. There were voluminous publications with statistics which were already outdated by the time the publications were issued. Without a special investigation into the usefulness of such publications for different types of users, it was not possible to be more specific. (See also para. 63 above for the comments contained in the report of the Secretary-General.) In addition, the report of the Secretary-General had indicated the intention of the Statistical Division to review both dissemination through large statistical publications and dissemination in machine-readable form.

Decision 7

67. "The Working Group requested the task forces established under paragraphs 50-55 above to address the question of publications in the course of their review of the particular subject areas. In particular the Working Group requested the task forces to consider the review undertaken by the Conference of European Statisticians, a/ and set up a similar review. The Working Group specified that this review should primarily concern publications in printed or similar form, but the relationship to machine-readable forms of dissemination should be taken into account. The Working Group considered that it would be in a position to consider the matter further when it had received the task force reports."

(b) An inventory of gaps and weaknesses in the international statistical system

68. The Working Group considered the following recommendations of the independent Review Group on gaps and weaknesses in the international statistical system:

> "(a) On the basis of the (descriptive) integrated work programme of statistics and related documentation, an effort should be made to identify weaknesses, gaps and imbalances in the current programme. In such a process budgetary aspects should be taken into account;
>
> "(b) Besides the continuation of efforts to reduce the time lag between the observation period and the moment of dissemination of structural and detailed statistics, for some statistical subjects consider the possibility of collecting and disseminating more recent statistical information (main indicators);
>
> "(c) The Commission may endorse these statements and choose a differentiated approach in order to ensure that urgent action can be taken now. In the short term it may request the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities to present a preliminary paper about these statements. In the longer term (when sufficient documentation is available) a new Review Group should be established."

The Review Group had noted some examples of imbalances when it was able to compare subjects and geographical regions with one another. The report of the Secretary-General had noted that coordination of international statistical work was essential owing to the size, complexity and decentralized nature of the global statistical system. The Review Group had noted that the emphasis lay mostly on the time lag between the observation period and the date of dissemination. However, a further idea was that, within the limits of available resources, a balance should be struck between detailed structural statistics on a certain statistical subject, the production of which took time at the national and international level, and short-term, provisional indicators on recent developments. The report of the Secretary-General had also noted that the development of an integrated world economy based on instantaneous world-wide telecommunications and the broadening popular awareness of and access to many forms of communications was placing an increasing premium on up-to-the-minute statistics and immediate world-wide access to whatever was available.

69. The Working Group recognized that improvements in the overall coverage of the statistical programmes of the international organizations might be made in relation to meeting user needs and made the decision which follows.

Decision 8

70. "The Working Group requested the task forces established by its decision 5 (see paras. 51-55 above) to carry out the two tasks described in paragraph 68 (a) and (b) above in their particular subject areas."

(c) Authoritative advice of the Statistical Commission

Recommendation 9

71. The role of the Commission should be to:

(a) Give authoritative advice on the allocation of statistical subjects to the agencies concerning statistical work, development/revision of standards and technical assistance;

(b) Give authoritative advice on the detailed agreements between the agencies on cooperation regarding the actual work to be performed.

72. The Review Group had considered that the potential role of the Statistical Commission and its Working Group should not be underestimated. The Commission was the forum in which all statistical programmes of the international agencies were considered. In principle all international agencies were represented in the sessions. The Commission could influence, via the Economic and Social Council, the governing bodies of various organizations of the United Nations system. If the Commission believed that more coordination and cooperation between international agencies in certain respects was desirable, the Commission could use its professional influence to reach its goal. As representatives of their Governments, the members of the Commission could also influence their Governments to follow certain policy lines with respect to the governing bodies of various organizations, including such organizations as OECD and EEC. (See also see the views of the Secretary-General in para. 19 above.)

73. The Working Group noted the emphasis that the independent Review Group had placed on the potential role of the Commission. The Working Group noted that the role of the Statistical Commission was mainly an advisory one but considered that its role should be strengthened in the interest of the global statistical system. The Working Group agreed that these were continuous activities because the global statistical system had to adapt continually to changing needs and judgements and the development of statistical science and technology.

D. Technical cooperation

74. The Working Group considered two particular aspects of technical cooperation that were of concern. First, changes in agency support-cost arrangements, specifically the subregional team approach adopted by UNFPA, were causing considerable concern, especially at the regional level, and were seriously affecting the ability of the regions to deliver regional advisory services consistent with country needs on a timely basis. These arrangements, by removing regional advisers from the statistical divisions, also affected the regular statistical work of the regional commissions, including their methodological work. The Working Group expressed concern at that situation, particularly in the light of its discussion on the role of the regional

statistical divisions and conferences of chief statisticians (see paras. 39-43 above). While recognizing that the basic team approach had already been endorsed by the UNFPA Governing Council and was being implemented, the Working Group endorsed the view expressed by ESCAP that there should be flexibility in the way the teams operated. The Working Group also noted that technical cooperation could be more effectively coordinated at the regional level through such forums as meetings of chief statisticians involving the countries concerned, as well as donors and the agencies. The Working Group noted that the support arrangements were on the agenda of the twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission and would be discussed in a report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.3/1993/17). It was agreed that that report should include an indication from UNDP and UNFPA of their policies, as well as an assessment of implications and proposals on how the needed flexibility could be introduced. The second important aspect of technical cooperation that was of continuing concern to the Working Group was the general question of its coordination, its efficiency and effectiveness, and the variability in the amount of resources available from year to year, a question that was also of concern to both donor and recipient countries.

Decision 9

75. "The Working Group decided to bring its concerns relating to technical cooperation again to the attention of the Statistical Commission."

E. Special concerns: orderly approach to any changes in data collection; 10-year plan for methodological work; region-based coordination

76. In discussing the report of the Secretary-General, the Working Group endorsed the view that safeguards and agreements among the organizations were needed to ensure an orderly approach to any changes in responsibility for data collection, and thereby ensure continuity in data to meet user needs. It reiterated its view that the development of the 10-year plan for methodological work proposed in the reports of both the Review Group and the Secretary-General was seen by the Working Group as being carried out in parallel with a number of other initiatives, including the work of the six task forces (see paras. 51-55 above), rather than being a task to be completed in advance of other initiatives. The Working Group also stressed the value of the proposed region-based coordination efforts. It noted that the coordination committee already established in the African region was an excellent example of this approach.

F. Adjustments and estimates

77. The Working Group welcomed the three reports presented to it on adjustment of nationally supplied statistical data (towards greater conformity with international standards) to improve international comparability of statistics, and on the making of estimates for non-reported national data (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.3/Add.1 and E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.4 and Add.1).

78. The Working Group noted with appreciation the steps that had been taken by international organizations in these areas in relation to international trade statistics and their plans for further cooperation. This was seen as an example of effective collaboration which benefited all the organizations, users and member States involved. The Working Group requested that the work continue and included it as one of the designated task force areas (see para. 51 above).

79. The report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.3) contained the following proposal in paragraph 7:

> "Following the endorsement by the ACC Subcommittee on Statistical Activities ..., the Statistical Division proposes to: (a) continue to collect, compile and disseminate nationally reported data; (b) supplement the nationally reported data with adjusted national data, where necessary and technically feasible, to make them more compatible with international standards, and prepare estimates for missing data also where technically feasible, so that the adjusted national data and estimates are seen as complementary to reported data; (c) include in its databases adjusted data and estimates prepared by other international organizations with competence in a particular field, along with full citations and notes to explain the sources and avoid duplication of effort and proliferation of conflicting data; (d) maintain databases of reported data, adjusted data and estimates for missing data, each appropriately identified; and (e) disseminate data to users or provide a system for informing users of the availability and nature of available adjusted and/or estimated data. Such a policy would require that the methodologies for making adjustments and estimates should be methodologically sound and should be described, and that national authorities should be generally aware that international statistical publications may contain adjustments relating to national data for international comparability purposes as well as estimates for missing data. At the same time countries that had not reported data, or whose reported data had been adjusted could be requested to provide comparable data if available."

Decision 10

80. "The Working Group endorsed the ideas set out in the report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.3/AC.1/1991/R.3/Add.1) concerning the Statistical Division's plans for continuing to collect, compile and disseminate nationally reported data and to extend its adjustment and estimation work to all fields in its responsibility as far as possible in order to meet the wide range of user needs. The Working Group decided that these plans should be brought to the attention of the specialized agencies for their consideration."

G. Points for discussion

81. The Statistical Commission may wish to:

(a) Comment on and make decisions in relation to the recommendations of the Working Group;

(b) Comment on and take note of the decisions and actions taken by the Working Group.

Notes

a/ See CES/741, 9 April 1992; CES/747, 24 April 1992; and ECE/CES/40, paras. 43-49.

Annex III

INDEX OF CROSS-REFERENCES BETWEEN THE REPORTS OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW GROUP (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.2) AND THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (E/CN.3/AC.1/1992/R.3) ON STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL STATISTICAL COOPERATION, BY SUBJECT a/

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